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Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art and the Landscapes of Southern Memory

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Review

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Mills, Cynthia, editor and Simpson, Pamela H., editor. *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art and the Landscapes of Southern Memory*. University of Tennessee Press, \$45.00 ISBN 1572332727

Sculpting the Lost Cause

Preserving Confederate glory in stone

Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art and the Landscapes of Southern Memory brings together art and architectural specialists and some of the most important historians working on gender and the Lost Cause to examine monument culture and the role of southern women in creating a regional memory of the Civil War. Divided into four sections according to broadly conceived themes, many of these essays draw on the best of the new scholarship that views public commemoration as a contested battleground where visions of personal and political futures play as much of a role as the antique past. The collection also, importantly, includes essays that examine how African Americans have challenged the hegemony of Confederate memory with the counter-memories of emancipation. Unfortunately, the selection of essays for this collection suffered from a serious lack of focus, with purely architectural studies bundled with traditional historical and contextual studies of monument building. Most disappointing of all, some of the essays depart from the stated purpose of the collection and fail to explore the role of women in constructing southern memory.

Part One contains the strongest offerings, bringing together essays on the roots of modern day controversy over Confederate symbolism in public spaces and showing that commemorative efforts already had a strong political content in the late nineteenth century. Catherine Bishir's contribution focuses on the Ladies Memorial Associations in North Carolina, arguing for an often dramatic interaction of memorial pursuits with political events. Catherine W. Zipf's essay, though offers one of the more fascinating contributions to this collection. Zipf's

work shows that the National Cemetery System and the commemoration of the Union war dead in the South served as a permanent, systematic embodiment of Federal authority within the former Confederacy. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, in certainly the book's most polished essay, concludes the section with a fascinating interpretative essay on the role of white women in the commemoration of the cause, an essay that many of us who teach the politics of southern memory will be employing in our undergraduate and graduate seminars for years to come. Finally, Kathleen Clark's essay looks at the efforts of African Americans in Augusta, Georgia to contest the memory and meaning of the Civil War through the celebration of July 4 and Emancipation Day. She also details the unhappy tale of how white Augusta constricted and contained this counter-narrative to the Lost Cause.

The book's second section is perhaps its weakest, containing several essays forced together under the rubric of Heroes and Heroines. Two of the essays in this section are primarily architectural and sthetic studies that focus, respectively, on Richmond's Monument Avenue and the sculptures at the Davis family grave in the Hollywood cemetery. Pamela Simpson's essay on a turn of the century controversy over the rebuilding of the Lee Chapel at Washington and Lee highlights the powerful cultural role played by commemorative organizations such as the United Daughter's of the Confederacy, a point that, unfortunately, the author does not press home. The best essay in this section, David Currey's contribution on public commemoration in Franklin, Tennessee, makes a persuasive case for the essentially conservative ethos that informed Confederate monument building. Currey connects the celebration of the Lost Cause and the anxieties of the small town south, islands in the midst of the swirling chaos of industrial change.

Parts Three and Four complement one another in their description of how the construction of a conservative, white supremacist ideology accompanied the construction of monuments to the southern cause. In Part Three, Karen Cox, author of an important new work on the UDC, examines the building and dedication of a Confederate monument in Arlington National Cemetery. Cox shows that this cultural moment should complicate our understanding of reconciliation between North and South since, as she puts it, the Arlington Monument was a monument of reconciliation, but a reconciliation based on terms that the white South found to be acceptable. Cynthia Mills also contributes a very incisive essay about the building of monument to the Women of the Sixties. Mills finds that these monuments portrayed a self-sacrificing, southern

lady of the patrician class, eliding the role of slaves on the homefront and many of the ugly truths about the war. In a state by state analysis of the building of monuments to Confederate women, Mills finds a profound anxiety at work about the changing role of women and the changing meaning of the household in the early twentieth century. This section also includes an essay by William M.S. Rasmussen, primarily an architectural and institutional study, on the planning and building of Richmond's Battle Abbey.

Section Four focuses on the role that race, and the ideological structures that surround it, played in the building of monuments to the Lost Cause. Micki McElya's essay on the UDC effort to build a statue honoring the Mammy figure of southern domestic mythology. McElya's discussion is notable for its emphasis given to the ultimately successful African American challenge to this effort. In a new version of an article that originally appeared in the *Georgia Historical Quarterly* Grace Elizabeth Hale argues that although Atlanta, Georgia's Stone Mountain carving represents an effort to set in stone a white, southern, Confederate identity it in fact serves as a gauge for the slippery nature of that identity in the twentieth century. A final essay on Richmond's Monument Avenue explains the heated controversy over the statue of Arthur Ashe. The authors, unfortunately, draw no real conclusions about the meaning of this controversy, suggesting that it could signify a new relationship...between its [Richmond's] black and white population or perhaps simply represent the city's dual personality.

Monuments to the Lost Cause contains a host of excellent illustrations, as a reader has the right to expect from a collection of this sort. To their credit, the editors avoided the temptation of filling up page after page with Confederate monuments. Like the text itself, their photographs reflect the controversy that surrounded these symbols. Readers will be able to see a photograph of demonstrators burning the Confederate flag in front of the South Carolina Soldier's monument in 2000, the 1899 dedication of the Jefferson and Winnie Davis memorials in Hollywood cemetery, and even scenes from an emancipation day parade in Charleston, SC in 1877.

Certainly this collection contains some very important individual essays, in fact a majority of them will add much to the growing scholarship on the southern Lost Cause. At the same time, there are two very serious criticisms that can be made of this collection. The first concerns its stated purpose and organization. The subtitle suggests that the role of women in shaping the landscapes of

southern memory will occupy the center stage in the analysis of monument commemoration. However, in a number of these essays this is simply not the case; the role of women is understated or ignored in many of these contributions. Nevertheless, scholars interested in the role of women in the Lost Cause will find this volume indispensable, particularly the essays by Bishir, Brundage, Mills and Simpson.

A second criticism concerns the amount of attention given to the commemorative effort in the Upper South, especially Virginia. Indeed, four of the essays focus specifically on Richmond! This aspect of the collection seems especially disappointing as so much of the scholarly work on the Lost Cause has already spent an inordinate amount of time on the celebration in Virginia, a southern state that's postbellum experience does not reflect the change and upheaval occurring in much of the rest of the American South. We certainly need more close readings of the sthetic celebration of the Confederacy, but have an embarrassment of riches when it comes to analysis of Richmond's monument avenue.

The above concerns make it difficult to recommend the collection as a whole for use in undergraduate and graduate level seminars. However, scholars interested in the southern Lost Cause movement or more generally in public representations of historical memory, will find many of the essays indispensable.

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